# The Effect of Gender Psychology Course on the Attitudes toward Gender Role by Undergraduate University Students in Turkey

Fuad Bakioğlu
*Karamnaoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey*, fuadpdr@gmail.com

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# The Effect of a Gender Psychology Course on the Attitudes Toward Gender Roles by Undergraduate University Students in Turkey

Fuad Bakioğlu

*Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey*

Author Note

**Abstract**

The aim of this study was to investigate whether a semester-long gender psychology course had an impact on the attitudes of undergraduates towards gender roles. To this end, a pretest-posttest analysis was carried out in a state university in Tokat, Turkey, employing a sample of 60 university students, 30 of whom had taken the course and 30 of whom had not. As a result of this study, it was concluded that the gender psychology course positively contributed to university students' egalitarian gender role attitudes. Indeed, the attitudes of the university students taking the course changed considerably at the end of the semester, developing more favorable attitudes toward gender issues.

Keywords: Gender psychology course, attitudes toward gender roles, egalitarian gender roles, university students, Turkey.

## Introduction

The topic of gender stereotypes is frequently researched in different cultural structures (Frieze et al., 2003). These studies involve the determination of undergraduates' level of gender stereotypes (Bosak, Eagly, Diekman, & Sczesny, 2018; Esen, Soylu, Siyez, & Demirgürz, 2017; León-Ramírez, Sanvicén-Torné, & Molina-Luque, 2018; Rice & Barth, 2016; Scarduzio, Carlyle, Harris, & Savage, 2017; Yu, 2018), intercultural comparisons (Frieze et al., 2003; Gibbons, Stiles & Shkodriani, 1991), testing the effectiveness of a course on gender equality (Erden, 2009; Esen, 2013; Hearne, 1986; Jones, Evans, Byrd, & Campbell, 2000; Orenstein, 1993).

Gender equality has also come up as an issue that should be given importance in Turkey. Within the scope of Gender Equality National Action Plan (2018) which was prepared by General Directorate of the Status of Women (GDSW), an action plan spanning the years between 2018 and 2023 was developed to ensure gender equality in Turkey. It was emphasized that women are less involved in and should be encouraged to be involved in education, economy, authority and decision-making mechanisms, health, and human rights.

In studies focusing on undergraduates in Turkey, it was emphasized that both males and females had gender stereotypes (Çelik, Pasinlioğlu, Tan, & Koyuncu, 2013; Vefikuluçay, Zeyneloğlu, Eroğlu, & Taşkın, 2007) and they should be given a gender psychology course to develop an egalitarian understanding (Öngen & Aytaç, 2013). As a matter of fact, a gender equality course provided for undergraduates was observed to improve their knowledge about gender equality and enabled them to develop an egalitarian attitude (Erden, 2009; Esen, 2013).

University life corresponds to a period in which individuals accomplish their identity search and find a spouse or partner (Valkenburg & Peter, 2008). In this period, individuals' gender stereotypes play an essential role in shaping their subsequent life (Vefikuluçay et al., 2007). Therefore, in the university period, in which individuals are able to make their own decisions, research on gender roles will make it possible for them to consider gender equality in their choices afterwards. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a gender psychology course at a state university in Tokat, Turkey, on undergraduates' gender role attitudes by comparing their pretest and posttest scores. Moreover, comparisons were made to determine whether the gender role attitudes of undergraduates who took a gender psychology course were significantly different from the gender role attitudes of those who did not.

### Theoretical Positioning of the Study

Individuals' innate gender characteristics attribute them specific roles depending on the society. Turkey was among the countries that is dominated by traditional gender roles (Bingöl, 2014). These traditional gender roles are reflected in data collected by statistics institutions within Turkey (TUIK, 2019). According to TUIK data, 50.2% of the Turkish population is male and 49.8% is female. The proportion of illiterate persons over the age of 25 was 4.8%, 8.0% for all women over the age of 25, and 1.5% for men. The proportion of workers aged over 15 in Turkey was 65.6%; this rate was 28.9% for the female population, 47.1% for males. The total employment rate in the agricultural sector was 19.4%, with the employment rate for the entire male population being 15.4% and the female employment rate being 28.3%. In the industrial sector, the total employment rate of the country population is 26.5%; the employment rate for the entire male population is 31.4% and the employment rate

for the entire female population is 15.6%. The total employment rate in the services sector was 54.1%, 53.2% for all men and 56.1% for all women. When all these data were examined, it was seen that all indicators were in favor of men.

Traditional societies teach their own values, traditions, and customs to each individual member of the society in order to maintain their existence. What the individuals learn from society about his or her gender constitutes gender socialization (Carter, 2014; Renzetti & Curran, 1999). Gender socialization occurs through individuals' interaction with their environment. Social environment usually involves family, friends, school, and mass communication devices. The individual obtains his or her early knowledge about his or her gender from the family. Then, he or she interacts with environment and learns about gender stereotypes from friends and school life (Burns, 1986; Carter, 2014; Dökmen, 2010; Jones & Wheatley, 1988; Miller, 2008; Pepin & Cotter, 2018).

From a child's first days, attributions about gender socialization are made by the parents. Gender socialization of males and females occur differently. For example, pink is preferred for the clothes of girls while blue—or other colors—are chosen for boys. Moreover, parents describe their sons by emphasizing some adjectives such as independent, self-confident, and strong while warm, emotional, and nurturing adjectives are used for daughters (Pepin & Cotter 2018; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Scarborough, Sin, & Risman, 2019).

Gender stereotypes are effective in shaping and differentiating the behaviors and thoughts of males and females (Constantine, 2000; Fenstermaker & West, 2002; Sankır, 2010; Turan, Öztürk, Kaya, & Aştı, 2011). Gender stereotypes have been studied more in relation with education, work, marriage, social-interpersonal relations, and parenthood (Dedeoğlu, 2000; Günay & Bener, 2011; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007). Gender stereotypes for women are observed to manifest itself in situations such as not being able to work without the permission of a man; being employed at low-wage and low-status jobs (Özaydınlık, 2014); not being able to have friends of the opposite sex; not being able to go out at night; not being able to live alone; being responsible from cooking, cleaning, and childcare (Fenstermaker & West, 2002); and being forced to choose from professions such as gynecologist, teacher, nurse, midwife, or secretary (Bhasin, 2003; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007). As can be seen, gender stereotypes indicate that women remain in the background and are not equivalent to men in taking responsibility.

Egalitarian gender roles make it possible for women to have equal rights in every area of life all over the world (King, King, Carter, Surface, & Stepanski, 1994). These roles refer to the redefinition of gender perception with the principle of equality and the lack of any restrictions sourcing from gender characteristics on the lives of individuals with respect to their lives (King, et al., 1994; King, King, Gudanowski, & Taft, 1997; Scarborough et al., 2019). Moreover, they indicate the freedom of both males and females to make their own decisions in areas such as education, work, marriage, social-interpersonal relations, and parenting roles, without prioritizing gender characteristics (Chao & Nath, 2011). In an egalitarian understanding, males and females take responsibility for their marriage together (Beere, King, Beere, & King, 1984; King & King, 1990), they take equal responsibility for childcare, females can make friends of the opposite sex and are equal to males in social areas, males and females can pursue an education at their own will, and they are not subject to prejudice and discrimination (Beere, et al.1984; Chao & Nath, 2011; King & King, 1990; King et al., 1994; King et al., 1997). In short, the ability to be an individual in each part of one's life in all over

the world and have neither advantage nor disadvantage because of one's gender reflects an egalitarian understanding.

## Method

### Participants
The study group comprised university students studying in Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in Turkey. The study was carried out between September 2017 and January 2018. In this study, 30 (22 female, 8 male) students in the experimental group and 30 (24 female, 6 male) students in the control group totaled 60 university students. The median age of included participants in the experimental group was 21 years old (M = 20.37, SD = 1.24, range = 18–23). The median age of included participants in the control group was 21 years old (M = 19.37, SD = 1.47, range = 18–24).

### Gender Psychology Course
It is assumed that extra courses taken by male and female undergraduates will help them realize their own judgements, assumptions, and prejudices, and build equality-based relations. Moreover, a gender psychology course for undergraduates can contribute to their having an egalitarian understanding and preparation for life as egalitarian individuals. Therefore, an elective course named "gender psychology" is offered to university students at the Department of Call Center Services Program at Gaziosmanpaşa University, Tokat, Turkey. It was observed that an elective gender psychology course was offered in different programs of some universities in Turkey such as Anadolu University, Ankara University, Dokuz Eylül University, Hacettepe University, and Middle East Technical University through their websites.

The gender psychology course was given three hours a week for 14 weeks. Each week, half of the course hour was allocated for the instructor while the other half was allocated for student activities. The main goal of this course was to inform the students about the effects of gender roles on society members and their own emotional, social, and psychological developments, as well as to create awareness. Moreover, the formation of gender roles and their effects on relations and daily social and cultural life were taught. In short, the course aimed to examine egalitarian gender roles in each part of life (choosing a profession, parenthood roles, in-house responsibilities, childcare, work life, and social and cultural life).

The course includes a midterm exam and a final paper. In addition, each student is required to write a research paper on a topic of interest relevant to egalitarian gender roles. Methods such as presentation, discussion, interview, group discussion, and role-playing were used within the scope of this course. The course outlines are planned for 14 weeks (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Gender psychology course outline

| Week | Subject |
| --- | --- |
| Week 1 | Introduction to the course; What do sex and gender roles mean? |
| Week 2 | Theories about gender and personality development |
| Week 3 | What do gender stereotypes mean? |
| Week 4 | What do egalitarian gender roles mean? |
| Week 5 | Historical overview of gender roles |
| Week 6 | Gender socialization: parents and peers as socialization agents |
| Week 7 | Gender roles in the home and family life |
| Week 8 | Gender roles in education |

| Week 9 | Gender roles in one's choice of profession |
| --- | --- |
| Week 10 | Gender roles in social life |
| Week 11 | Gender roles in opposite-sex relationships |
| Week 12 | Gender roles in art and cultural life |
| Week 13 | Gender roles in visual and written media and virtual environments |
| Week 14 | Summary; How do we achieve gender equality in our lives? |

**Procedure**

This study performed two group pretest and posttest analyses. I obtained the pretest results by applying a Gender Roles Attitudes Scale to 30 students who enrolled in the gender psychology course with code number CMH227 and 30 students who did not, at the very beginning of the semester. I applied the scale to the same students at the end of the semester to obtain the posttest results. Then I compared the results from pre- and posttests. I administered the experimental procedure to the experimental group within the scope of the gender psychology course during 14 weeks. No experimental procedure was administered to control group.

**Data Analysis**

I tested the normality assumption using skewness (-.10 and .39), kurtosis (-.67 and -.45), and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to decide on the statistical techniques to be used. Accordingly, I observed that the data distributed normally. In this study, an independent sample *t*-test and ANCOVA analysis were used to analyze the data. I carried out the analyses using the SPSS 22.0 software program.

**Instruments**

**Gender Role Attitudes Scale.** The attitude toward gender roles was measured with the Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS) developed by García-Cueto and his colleagues (2015). The GRAS is a self-report questionnaire with 15 items. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Items include statements such as, "People should be treated equally, regardless of their sex." GRAS was translated into Turkish by Bakioğlu and Türküm (2019). The total score of the Turkish-GRAS was the sum of the 15 items, with the range from 15 to 75. While the highest score represents the most egalitarian attitudes, the lowest score represents the most traditional attitudes. The midpoint of the scale is 45, which may be used as a benchmark in identifying whether the attitude of a participant is egalitarian or traditional. The Turkish versions of the GRAS have good construct validity ($\chi 2/df = 2.44$, RMSEA = .07, GFI = .90, AGFI = .87, CFI = .96, IFI = .96, NNFI = .96 and SRMR = .05) and internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) and test-retest reliability coefficients ($\alpha = .77$). In this study, the GRAS also exhibited good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

**Results**

In this study, pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups were calculated (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of experiment and control groups

| Groups | *n* | Pretest | | Posttest | | Mean difference (post-pre) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | |
| Control | 30 | 47.03 | 8.91 | 45.00 | 8.05 | -1.97 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experiment | 30 | 45.66 | 10.19 | 60.13 | 8.00 | +14.47 |

The pretest mean scores were calculated as 45.66 in the experimental group and 47.03 in the control group. There was no significant difference between the pretest mean scores of the experimental and control groups (t[58] = 0.55, p = .582). However, there was a significant difference between the posttest mean scores of the experimental and control groups (t[58] = 7.30, p < 0.05). Pretest and posttest scores of women and men in the experimental group were compared (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Experimental group pre-posttest scores by gender

| | | Pretest | | Posttest | | | Mean difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Groups | n | M | SD | M | SD | t | (post-pre) |
| Male | 8 | 38.75 | 6.63 | 58.12 | 8.50 | 16.36 | +19.37 |
| Female | 22 | 48.32 | 10.05 | 60.86 | 7.88 | 22.53 | +12.54 |

In Table 3, it was seen that the mean scores of both women and men increased significantly. In this study, I aimed to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. ANCOVA analysis was used to test this hypothesis. ANCOVA compares the pre- and posttest scores by controlling the previous scores between groups. There should not be a high correlation between pre- and posttest scores for ANCOVA (i.e., r < 0.7; Trochim, 2001). The Pearson correlation coefficient between pretest and posttest scores was calculated as 0.43, which was lower than 0.7. In ANCOVA, the slopes of the regression lines should be homogenous (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003). The experimental and control groups' scatter plot of the pretest and posttest scores are given Figure 1.
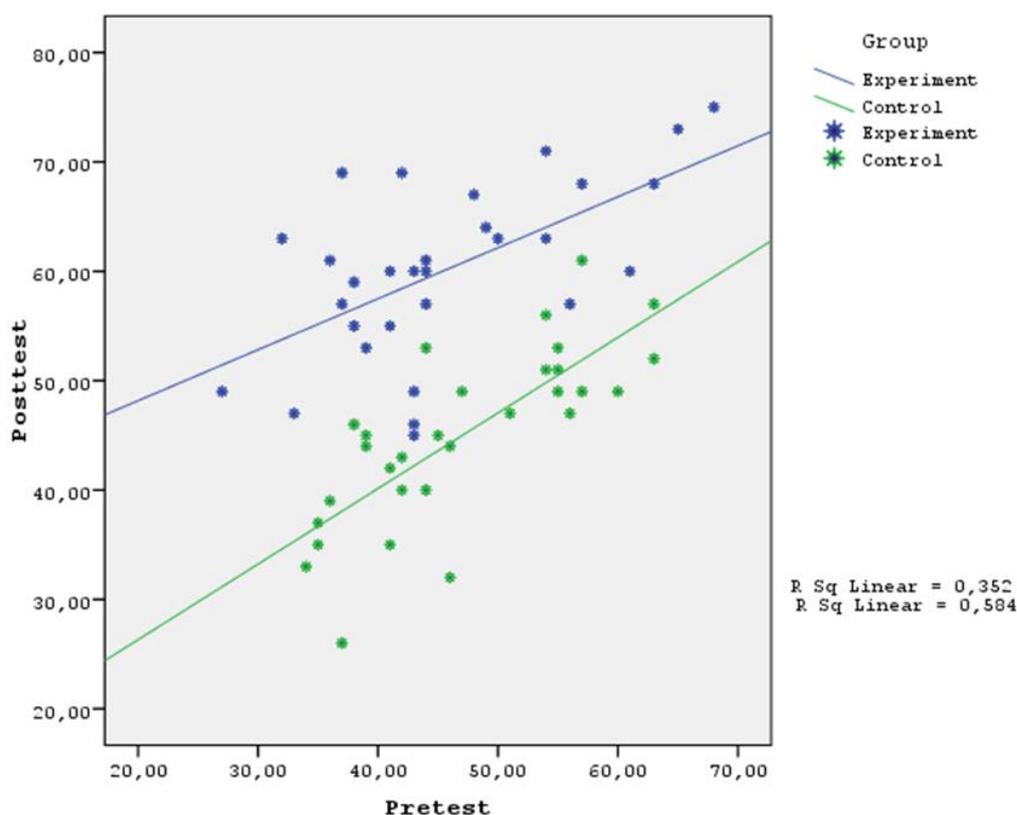


**Fig. 1.** Scatter plot of the pre- and posttest scores

Figure 1 shows that the distribution is different for the experiment and control groups. The slope of regression line was found to be .584 for the control group and .352 for the experimental group. These results showed that the slope of the regression was heterogeneous. In the light of all these results, the pre- and posttest mean difference scores of the experimental and control groups were compared using ANCOVA. The purpose of this comparison was to examine whether a term-length gender psychology course increased posttest scores of the experimental group rather than the control group (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** The result of ANCOVA of gender roles attitudes posttest in terms of groups

| Source | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender Role (pretest) | 2395.829 | 1 | 2395.829 | 46.128 | .000 |
| Group | 25.136 | 1 | 25.136 | .484 | .490 |
| Error | 2908.585 | 56 | 51.939 | | |
| Total | 134241.000 | 60 | | | |

Table 4 showed a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups [F(1–56)= 46.128 p<.05]. The mean scores of the experiment group significantly increased from a pretest score of 45.66 to a posttest score of 60.13 while those of the control group remain statistically the same in the pre- and posttests.

## Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Gender equality is an important issue regarding every part of life in Turkey. In this study, I examined whether a term-length gender psychology course positively affected undergraduates' attitudes towards egalitarian gender roles.

First of all, the mean score of Gender Roles Attitudes Scale was 45 for the experimental group while it was 47 for the control group. Therefore, I observed that participants in both groups had slightly egalitarian views of gender roles. The mean score remained nearly the same for the control group while it increased to 60 in the experimental group. This finding proved that undergraduates taking this course developed positive attitudes towards egalitarian gender roles. On the other hand, the attitudes of undergraduates who did not take the course remained the same. These findings are consistent with the literature (Erden, 2009; Hearne, 1986; Jones et al., 2000; Orenstein, 1993). Moreover, it was possible to state that this attitude took a long period of time to change.

In Turkey, it is observed that undergraduates have traditional gender roles and maintain these roles while preparing for life. Accordingly, undergraduates need to be educated about gender roles (Çelik et al., 2013; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007) and there is a necessity to include courses about it (Erden, 2009). Unfortunately, gender psychology courses are offered at a limited number of universities in Turkey. However, the period of life in which a person attends university corresponds to young adulthood. Young adulthood is the period in which individuals build satisfying relations with the opposite sex and prepare for marriage (Valkenburg & Peter, 2008). Therefore, having egalitarian gender roles will make it possible for both males and females to be equal in every part of life. In gender psychology courses offered within the scope of this research during a semester, information about gender psychology were provided. Therefore, having an egalitarian view of gender roles will remove gender-based problems, ensure equality, and help undergraduates prepare for life in an equality-based manner.

Policymakers and nongovernmental organizations in Turkey take steps to ensure gender equality, especially in educational settings. Moreover, individuals' rights are protected on a legal basis, independent from gender. However, in practice, it is seen that traditional opinions regarding gender roles prevail. Therefore, educating every individual in society about egalitarian gender roles will help make equality a reality.

Most of the participants in this study were female. The future studies should involve more male and female participants to measure undergraduates' attitudes towards gender roles and make comparisons. Future studies concerning this topic can benefit from the inclusion of qualitative data, which can explore participants' experiences in greater depth.

An important conclusion drawn from this study is that the attitudes of undergraduates who took the gender psychology course increased dramatically when compared with the attitudes of control group undergraduates who did not. Moreover, the gender roles and attitudes of undergraduates who did not take the gender psychology course did not change.

*Fuad Bakioğlu is an assistant professor of psychological counseling and guidance at the Faculty of Education, Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey. He holds a PhD in psychological counseling and guidance from Anadolu University. His research interests include psychological counseling and guidance, gender roles, cyber bullying, moral disengagement, multicultural counseling, and internet addiction.*

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